

St. Thomas Episcopal Church in Medina, WA
The Rev. Alexander Breckinridge
Church Year C
Date: 1/17/16
Season: Epiphany 2
John 2:1-11

You may remember – and I hope you do – a couple of Sundays ago when we read the first chapter of John’s gospel. It’s a Creation Story. “In the beginning.” Just like Genesis. John tells us that the Word – the divine Logos – comes from God and is God. And the Word has come into the world to show us what God looks like and to show us what God does. “From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only son who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known,” John tells us.

So God isn’t an abstract concept. God decided to become a real flesh and blood human being so we could have a real relationship. It’s hard to have a relationship with a concept or an idea. But a relationship with a human being – now we have something we can work with.

So this morning we join this human being, Jesus of Nazareth, as he sets out on his mission. And it’s important to note the place where we meet him. At a wedding feast. As a gathering of friends and family to celebrate a deeply human moment. This joining together of two bodies and two souls in an enduring bond of relationship. And in Jesus’ time and place, a wedding feast would have involved the whole village of Cana and it would have gone on for a week. Jesus is emerging into his public life in the midst of the social fabric of village life. So this wedding feast is Jesus’ “coming out” party, if you will. His debut.

And look who he’s with. His Mom! Now it’s interesting that Mary only appears twice in John’s gospel – here at this wedding and then at the foot of the cross at the end of the story. And John never names her. She’s always described as “his mother” or “the mother of Jesus.” Now his Mom recognizes a serious problem and points it out to her son. The wine has run out. To run out of wine at a wedding feast was a matter of disgrace for the host. A serious matter indeed.

Jesus then has a very curious response: “Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come.” First, to our modern ear, Jesus reference to his mother as “Woman” might sound harsh or disrespectful. Not so in his time. It was a well-accepted and very neutral form of address so no need to read anything into it. His reference to his

“hour” clearly refers to the hour of his death, the time when he will be lifted up to his Father and draw all people to him. Undoubtedly, Mary will remember that reference when we will next meet her as she waits at the foot of the cross. Now, even though he at first resists her implied request, Jesus, for reasons we aren’t told, apparently decides to meet the need and to begin to reveal his glory now, in this moment.

“Do whatever he tells you,” Mary says to the servants and they do. Six big – and I mean big – stone jars are filled with water and brought to Jesus. And then an interesting thing happens. Jesus tells the servants to take some of the contents of the jars to the steward. The steward didn’t know where it had come from and when he tasted it, well, it wasn’t Boone’s Farm. No, it was the Chateau LaFitte. The very best. And then the steward compliments the bridegroom. “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk, but you have kept the good wine until now.” The party goes on, even better than before. The bridegroom’s reputation is saved and even gets better. And this was the first of Jesus’ signs that revealed his glory. And what was the sign? In Jesus presence, the abundance of God’s love is poured out for the world. Jesus enters a bad situation and his presence transforms it. An amazing coming out party.

And you know, we’re at another coming out party this morning. A coming out party for these three beautiful babes, Steele, Bo, Lois who are about to become the newest members of the household of faith. We’re going to welcome them and celebrate with them just like that long ago day in Cana. Maybe with not quite as much wine. But the celebration will be heartfelt. And these babes are here with their mothers and fathers and godmothers and godfathers and their families. So a word for our babes on this blessed day and a word for all of us comes from Jesus’ mother. “Do whatever he tells you to do.” It’s the simplest, most direct, easiest to understand, hardest to follow instructions ever given. “Do whatever he tells you to do.”

You know, it’s interesting, though, in John’s gospel Jesus doesn’t actually give a lot of instructions or a lot of advice. He sure doesn’t lecture or hand out guide books.

He really says something pretty simple, and he says it over and over in John’s gospel. “Love each other. This is my commandment,” he says, “that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends....you did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

So if we’re going to “do whatever he tells us,” it begins and ends in love. And love isn’t abstract. Love is tangible. Love acts. Love reaches out to those who are hurt and

hungry and suffering. Love is patient and kind and tender and merciful to those who need mercy. And that's all of us. Love doesn't react in anger or jealousy or fear. Love doesn't close doors to the stranger or to the homeless or the refugee. Love opens those doors.

And Love is here. Among us. This weekend, 18 of our middle school youth are on a retreat with other middle school youth from across the diocese. They'll be meeting Jesus as they laugh and sing and learn and grow in grace together. Love is here in the beautiful music that Charles and our choir make – the music that lifts us all up to Heaven when we allow it to. Love is here at this altar. Bread and wine bearing Jesus – bearing Love. Shared together for the sake of the world.

“Do whatever he tells you,” the Mother of Jesus says. And what Jesus tells us to do is to love. Not accumulate stuff. Not distract ourselves with smart phones and devices. Not hide among those who think exactly like we do. No, Jesus tells us to love. And that might mean letting go of some of our stuff. That might mean getting our heads out of our devices and making real connections with people. That might mean, for goodness' sake, listening to someone who maybe has some different ideas than yours. The might mean forgiving someone who's hurt you, even if that person hasn't asked for forgiveness. And this is hard. Recognizing when you yourself have hurt someone and asking them to forgive you. That's just what Love does.

The wine that poured out of those big stone jars on that long ago day in Cana was the Love of God pouring out into the world. And it's still being poured out for each of us, for this community of St. Thomas, and for the world. It's up to us to come and taste it. And it's up to you and me to “do whatever he tells us.” It's up to you and me to do Love.

Amen